

LAOS

Behind Phnom Penh's musical

By Charles Meyer
Pacific News Service

Lon Nol's recent abdication of power in Phnom Penh has once again brought into the spotlight the man whom the CIA has long sought to impose upon Cambodia. Only three months after the coup of March 1970 which overthrew Prince Norodom Sihanouk, most politicians in the Cambodian capital were predicting a short term for Premier Lon Nol, and naming as his probable successor Son Ngoc Thanh.

Son was born Dec. 7, 1908 in Ky La, South Vietnam, of a Cambodian father and a Vietnamese mother. After attending a French high school, he moved to Phnom Penh in 1937, a functionary in the government there. The same year he started a nationalist group which published the first native language journal, Nagaravatta (Land of the Pagodas).

In 1941, French Indochina, still technically ruled by the Vichy government, granted the use of military facilities to the Japanese, in exchange for maintaining French sovereignty over Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Son immediately became an active collaborator with the Japanese Black Dragon Society, which aimed at overthrowing the French. On the verge of arrest by French authorities in the summer of 1942, Son fled to Tokyo.

With defeat imminent, the Japanese abolished the colonial administration in March 1945 and imprisoned all French citizens in Cambodia. A month later Son appeared in Phnom Penh as a Japanese captain and became minister in charge of relations with the Japanese command. On Aug. 10 a palace revolt inspired by Son and supported by the Kempeitai (Japanese police) forced Sihanouk, then king, to confer upon Son the office of prime minister.

Following the collapse of Japanese power, Sihanouk on Oct. 8 secretly delegated a cabinet minister to go to Saigon for the avowed purpose of discussing "certain questions" with the French command. A week later French Gen. Leclerc arrived in Phnom Penh and arrested Son. He was put in the Saigon jail and then sentenced to forced labor for collaborating with the Japanese. Soon, he was sent to France and put under house arrest.

After several royal interventions, Son was pardoned in October 1951. He returned to Phnom Penh on the agreement that he would abstain from all political activities. He refused the ministerial portfolio Sihanouk offered to him, but within a

few weeks—encouraged by several prominent Americans—he revealed clear political intentions. Early in 1952 he began publishing *Khmer Krauk* (Cambodians Awake!), violating his repatriation agreement with the French. By March he fled the city to rejoin an underground resistance band in northwest Siamreap province. He had, there, only a few hundred men and a radio transmitter. His broadcasts called upon the population to rise up and overthrow colonial rule under the French.

Joins with the CIA

In November 1953, Sihanouk's efforts at influencing the French paid off and Cambodia was granted formal independence. Son tried to gain some control in the new regime at Phnom Penh. Unsuccessful, he returned to the armed band in the northwest, where defections during his absence had weakened the ranks severely. His political constituency gone, in the wake of French maneuverings, Son was forced to ally himself with the CIA. In January 1956 the final blow was struck, as government troops attacked his camp near the Thai border killing 108 men and destroying the radio station. Son and a few men escaped and entered the service of the CIA in Bangkok.

Although his movement—now known as the *Khmer Serai* (Free Cambodia)—had been crushed, the CIA revived it steadily and built it into an army of 5000 ethnic Cambodians. Most of these men were recruited from Cambodians living in Thailand and South Vietnam. The mercenary army was based on Thai territory, from which it launched sabotage missions. Son became a front for these operations and plots, mounted jointly by the CIA and U.S. Army Intelligence in Bangkok and Saigon, against Sihanouk and Cambodian neutrality.

The *Khmer Serai*, transformed into the "National Liberation Front of Cambodia" (sic), announced on May 15, 1970 its support for the regime which grew out of the coup under Gen. Lon Nol. Son, however, secretly entered the capital as his supporters began to prepare for a return to power. Lon Nol, who had the full backing of the Pentagon, wasn't about to step down for the CIA's man. Son had to settle for the post of principal advisor to the premier.

But Cambodian public opinion remains very unfavorable to Son. The urban youth is violently hostile to him. He therefore continues to live in Saigon, where he has the solid support of the South Vietnamese puppets and the entourage of U.S. Ambassador Bunker. More importantly, he enjoys the loyalty of the Cambodian armies trained by American Special Forces units, who consider him a "spiritual father." Son has also renewed his ties with the Japanese groups which carried him to power in 1945. Representatives from Tokyo consult him on their Indochinese political and economic questions.

Son Ngoc Thanh wants to redeem the defeats that impeded his political life, and now anxiously awaits his hour. The CIA, which has backed Son for fifteen years, will be happy to make good his losses.

Charles Meyer was editor-in-chief of the magazine Etudes Cambodgiennes (Cambodian Studies) and Nokor Khmer. From 1957 through 1970 he was a counselor to the cabinet of Sihanouk and continued as such to Lon Nol until June 1970.

1 JUN 1971

U.S. role in Laos stirs rumblings in Congress

By George W. Ashworth
Staff correspondent of
The Christian Science Monitor

Washington

American activities in Laos—the administration's extreme reluctance to talk about them—threaten now to increase the President's difficulties on Capitol Hill and with the public.

Little is known outside administration circles of the precise extent of American involvement in Laos. This administration—like the Democratic administration before it—simply does not want to discuss the subject at all. Senators have run into difficulty finding out even in private just what is going on.

That fact is much more worrisome to the regular critics of the President's policies in Indo-China, such as Sen. J. W. Fulbright (D) of Arkansas, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, than it is to those more favorably inclined to the President's war policies.

But Laos provides a source of contention, and the administration now is urged by critics to level with Capitol Hill and with the public.

This newspaper reported a month ago that the administration has worked out an agreement with the Government of Thailand for sharply increased use of Thai forces in Laos in support of the neutralist government.

It was reported that, as a consequence, the use of Thai forces had sharply risen in Laos over some months from well under 1,000 to a figure believed in excess of 4,000. And, from all indications, the Thai Government was willing to provide far more if the American administration would provide funds.

The story prompted Sen. Clifford P. Case (R) of New Jersey to fire off a letter to Secretary of State William P. Rogers asking comment on the accuracy of the reports, and, as-

suming correctness, answers on five points:

○ Does the administration consider the financial support of Thai troops in Laos to be in accord with the Cooper-Church provisions in the 1970 Defense Appropriations Act that bans the payment of mercenaries except to protect a safe and orderly American withdrawal or disengagement from Southeast Asia or to aid in the release of United States prisoners?

○ In the agreement with Thailand to be presented as a treaty to the Senate?

○ What are the agreement's specifics, including cost and duration?

○ Will supplemental appropriations be asked, or is reprogramming envisioned?

○ Has the U.S. Government given the Thais assurance of support in the event Thai troops encounter difficulties?

Brief response

According to sources, the administration's written response was far from elaborate. Further elaboration is being sought. After comparing the State Department report with information given by two Foreign Relations Committee aides just back from Laos, Senator Case described the administration reply as "incomplete and in certain respects inaccurate."

Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern and Pacific Affairs, is expected in the near future to be available to brief the committee in secret session on the Laos operations.

The Thai troops are not the only issue related to Laos that has drawn senatorial interest. So far, the costs of various activities in Laos are sketchy at best. The only generally available figure is \$50 million or so per year for activities of the Agency for International Development (AID).

Military aid disclosed

Total military assistance funded by the services in Laos in fiscal 1970 was disclosed in subcommittee hearings as

\$90 million. But the figures for fiscal 1971, which now is drawing to a close, and fiscal 1972, beginning July 1, are so far not on the record.

Nor is the cost of the U.S. establishment in Laos or of bombing missions in support of the fighting in northern Laos on the record.

This administration and the one before it argue that full or relatively full disclosure would make the U.S. in clear violation of the Geneva Accords that established the theoretical neutrality of Laos.

The North Vietnamese have been extremely active in Laos for years. And the Americans have been in the fray as a counter to that North Vietnamese activity.

Reason for reluctance

Since the North Vietnamese will not admit what they are doing, the Americans are also reluctant to be open on the matter. To do so would not only hurt the bargaining position of the South Vietnamese side, but it would also give the North Vietnamese substantial ammunition for propaganda warfare. And, beyond that, disclosure could, it is argued,

make it almost certainly impossible to reestablish neutrality under the present Geneva Accords.

As a result of this policy, however, the North Vietnamese, the Pathet Lao, the Royal Lao Government, the Americans involved, all Communist-bloc nations, and other interested parties have a pretty clear idea of what the North Vietnamese and the Americans are doing. Left out in the informational cold are the Congress and the American public.

Overseeing function

In such a circumstance, critics argue, the overseeing function of the Congress cannot be exercised, and it is necessary to take the administration on blind faith in such matters. For doubters, such as Mr. Fulbright and Mr. Case, blind faith is not enough.

Much of the American effort in Laos is being carried out under the direction of the Central Intelligence Agency. One skeptic said, "From what I can gather, the CIA is doing a very capable job in Laos. No other group, such as the Army, could do nearly so well. From the point of view of how well what we are doing in Laos is being handled, there probably isn't much argument. But there is the question of just how much of what we are doing we should be doing."

1 JUN 1971

Thailand Says China Building Border Road

Reuter

BANGKOK, Thailand, May 31—Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn today said Chinese engineers building a strategic road in northern Laos have started work near the Mekong River town of Pak Beng, only 20 miles from the Thai border.

Thanom told reporters a completed stretch of a 75-mile road from Muong Sai to Pak Beng was being used by North Vietnamese and pro-Communist Pathet Lao troops to transport supplies.

The road to Pak Beng will open an all-weather supply route to just across the border from the Thai province of Nam where Communist-trained Meo guerrilla tribesmen are entrenched.

30 MAY 1971

Trips Never Publicized

Gen. Haig: Nixon's Viet Nam Observer

BY ALDO BECKMAN

[Chicago Tribune Press Service]

WASHINGTON, May 29 — Altho President Nixon receives daily reports from the warfront in Southeast Asia, he occasionally likes to send his own man over there to have a personal look-see.

That man, who has made four trips to South Viet Nam as the eyes and ears of the President, is an army general who wears civilian clothes during his seven-day work week at the White House, but dons his brigadier general's uniform in South Viet Nam because it makes him less conspicuous.

A brigadier general in Viet Nam is not a fellow who "stirs a big fuss," explained Alexander M. Haig during an interview in his tiny office just off the main lobby of the White House. "Many of their visitors have much more rank or status."

Deputy to Kissinger

Haig's official title is deputy assistant to the President for national security, but he, in effect, serves as the alter ego of and office manager for Henry A. Kissinger, the President's chief White House foreign policy adviser.

A brief session with Haig is an easy indication of the role he plays in Kissinger's operation.

The interview was interrupted by several phone calls from Kissinger. Kissinger stuck his head in the door once and, finally, after little more than 30 minutes, came in to chat himself. This was a sure signal that he wanted the interview broken off so he could talk to Haig in private.

(Haig Pays Visits

President Nixon has called on Haig, a 46-year-old West Point graduate who exudes a quiet self-confidence, to visit Viet Nam during every major "pivot point" in Nixon's effort



Alexander Haig during interview.

to wind down the war. This included the incursions into Laos and Cambodia and shortly before major troop withdrawal announcements.

The Viet Nam trips are never publicized, and Haig never takes more than a couple of staff members with him. He never announces his itinerary.

His most recent trip to Viet Nam was in March, when he visited Khe Sahn during the Laotian incursion. He's been to Cambodia twice and it was his initial assessment of the Lon Nol government there that gave the President such confidence at a time when news reports from the scene were predicting the imminent collapse of his regime.

Served as Commander

Haig has spent more time in South Viet Nam than any other official of the Nixon administration, having spent more than a year there as a commanding officer in the First Infantry Division.

While there, he participated in one of the most savage battles of the war, shortly before the Tet offensive, and received the Distinguished Service Medal for leading an isolated, surrounded company back to friendly territory.

Rubbing elbows with the nation's leaders is nothing new for Haig, who served as deputy special assistant to former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and as military assistant to the Secretary of

the Army Cyrus Vance when Vance's office was named by President Kennedy to handle a study during the Cuban missile crisis.

Given New Title

He was, in fact, named military assistant to Kissinger—being picked from among 240 top officers of the three major services—when he joined the White House staff in 1969. But when it became apparent that he was handling responsibilities far outweighing those handled by most military assistants, Haig was given the title of deputy assistant to the President.

Haig, according to White House sources, actually makes many minor decisions under Kissinger's name because, after working under the ebullient former Harvard professor, he knows exactly how Kissinger thinks.

Haig was born in Philadelphia, the son of a lawyer. But, from his earliest recollections, he wanted to make military service a career.

Haig failed to gain admittance to West Point on his first try, but after a year at the University of Notre Dame, was admitted to the military academy in 1944. He returned there as assistant commandant and dean of men after combat duty in Viet Nam and just before his assignment to the White House.

Despite his daily contacts with President Nixon and influence in foreign policy formulation, surpassed by only a handful of men, Haig who is expected to gain his second star soon, still insists that he looks forward to returning to a command post.

"That's the most intensely demanding job there is in the military," he said. "Twenty-four hours a day, you have the responsibility for your men."

FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM John Chancellor, NBC News, Reports

STATION WRC Radio
NBC Network

DATE May 24, 1971

6:50 PM

CITY Washington, DC

FULL TEXT

JOHN CHANCELLOR: Let's begin with a short quiz: what is Radio Free Europe? Answer: an independent broadcasting station in Europe which beams uncensored news to the people who live across the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe.

How does Radio Free Europe support itself? Answer: from private contributions raised in the United States.

Is there anything else that is important to know about Radio Free Europe? Answer: it is a secret operation of the United States Government, which gets most of its money through the CIA.

A lot of people don't know that. And today in the US Congress, bills are being introduced to change it. Who supports these bills? Answer: President Nixon.

I'll have a report on all this in a minute.

* * *

For several decades, the two American sponsored international radio stations have been broadcasting from Munich in West Germany to the people of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Programs to Russia are beamed in a number of languages by an outfit called Radio Liberty. Programs to Eastern Europe, by the far better known Radio Free Europe.

We've all seen the ads taken by Radio Free Europe asking for contributions. And a lot of people were surprised last January when Senator Clifford Case of New Jersey disclosed that these two radio stations really got their money from the US Government.

Case revealed that the bulk of the operating money -- about \$30 million a year, was funnelled through the Central Intelligence Agency. Funnelled through is the precise way to put it. There is no evidence that the CIA had any operational control over the broadcasts themselves, although there must have been some machinery somewhere for broad policy control.

FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM NBC News

STATION WRC Radio
NBC Network

DATE May 24, 1971

7:00 PM

CITY Washington, DC

CIA FUNDING

NEWSCASTER: Sharp argument came in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee today over the operation of Radio Free Europe, which broadcasts to Eastern Europe, and Radio Liberty which broadcasts to Russia.

Assistant Secretary of State Martin Hillenbrand testified the stations perform a valuable service for people living under a government controlled press.

But Committee Chairman J. William Fulbright argued that the strong anti-Communist tone of the broadcast is not in keeping with current US policy for improving relations with the Soviets.

It had been disclosed that Radio Free Europe, which conducts fund raising drives as a private organization had been financed by the CIA at a rate of about \$30 million a year.

Now the administration proposes public funding.

The following exchange came between Chairman Fulbright and Assistant Secretary Hillenbrand.

SENATOR J. WILLIAM FULBRIGHT: Did the CIA spend -- did it support these operations during the past years by as much as 90 percent of the cost?

SECRETARY HILLENBRAND: Well, Mr. Chairman, I really would prefer to discuss the history in an executive session. We're prepared...

SENATOR FULBRIGHT: ...But I don't prefer it. I think it's time -- this -- the whole effort of the Senate here was to put this out on the open...

SECRETARY HILLENBRAND: Well, we can discuss...

SENATOR FULBRIGHT: Now (words unintelligible)...

SECRETARY HILLENBRAND: No.

SENATOR FULBRIGHT: What's the matter with that?

SECRETARY HILLENBRAND: We can discuss anything about the future

right here and now, and I'm prepared to do that. But there are certain sensitivities about what has happened in the past...

SENATOR FULBRIGHT: Everybody else knows it. The Germans know it. And the Russians know it. The only one you're trying to fool is this committee.

NEWSCASTER: Senator Fulbright and Assistant Secretary of State Hillenbrand.